

ANTI-TRINITARIAN CRUSADE

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The following article is by Pastor Denis Gibson, Calvary Baptist Church, 310 Mill St. S., #1212, Brampton, Ontario L6Y 3B1 Canada --

Once again the United Church of Canada is publicly giving voice to its denial of fundamental Christian doctrine. In recent pronouncements, the Moderator, the Rev. William Phipps, with the support of the Church's General Council, has openly denied the Deity of Christ, and with it the doctrine of the Trinity (Toronto Star, November 1997).

In former days, now long gone, there were great "stalwarts of the Faith" who were ready to die, and did in fact often die, in the defense of that Faith. Even the temporal power of the State had been used against them. Today, has not the very corruption of the world infected the churches? Why, then, we may ask, were Paul, Peter, John, and Jude so strong and outspoken in their denunciation of error in all its forms, and of the teachers of such errors, in their time? Why were they so concerned for the "truth" if, as in our day "anything goes" and one can still claim to be a "Christian" even if he/she denies Christ? Those who dare to stand up for the "faith once delivered to the saints" are labeled "vicious," "little popes," or the favorite barb, "bigots"! The doubters or deniers of "the faith" are seen as "courageous," "far-seeing," "boldly prophetic," "trail-blazers"! It does not seem to matter what a person believes, so long as he or she gives the impression of being truly "sincere" and ready to find room for all views. Nothing much has changed in that department over the ages.

"Old Mrs. Bigot is dead and buried; her funeral sermon has been preached to a crowded congregation; and this is the inscription put, by general consent [or General Council], upon her tombstone:

"For modes of faith let graceless bigots fight;
"He can't be wrong whose life is in the right."
(The Eternal Sonship of Christ, J.C. Philpot, p. 28)

Many quibbled about the doctrine of the Trinity, or denied it outright, because they claimed it was "an absurdity" or "irrational" or "a logical contradiction", or just so much "theological baggage" carried over from old, out-worn creeds from the dim and dusty past. Now, "homo sapiens, man come of age" (Tom Harper, Toronto Star, Nov. 15), has gotten rid of the problem and simplified the meaning of "god" for all of us, but have they indeed? Can we not hear the Muslims, Sikhs, Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, etc., as well as the unbelievers and the uninformed in so-called Christian churches shouting for joy? The United Church has now at

long last seen "the light" and openly joined them in their anti-trinitarian crusade that emerged in the fourth century with Arius.

What has been the result? In the past, the denial of the deity of Christ has led to the decimation of once vibrant churches around the world. It was so when the followers of Mohammed (A.D. 570-632) swept through Palestine, Syria, Persia, North Africa, and on to Spain, replacing dead and divided churches that denied or doubted the essential Deity of Christ with Islamic mosques and eventually, the Koran. In the West, especially over the last two hundred years or so, we have seen Christian congregations that denied the Deity of Christ and the Trinity, "wither on the vine."

So "What think ye of Christ, whose Son is He?" is still the vital Issue that divides Biblical Christianity from the "humanistic religion" that began by denying the Deity of Christ, and proceeded to the deification of man! In "The Leaven of the Sadducees" (Chicago, 1926), Ernest Gordon cites a leading advocate of the "new" thought as saying: "Our faith needs the never-ending voice of the prophet going up and down the land crying, 'Prepare ye the way of mankind and make its path straight'" (p. 75). Another advocate of this school declared: "It would be better if we had to choose ... to believe in Man and not in God than to believe in God and not Man" (ibid., p. 77). This is stark humanism or what is termed "democratized religion." "Glory to Man in the highest! for Man is the master of things." So penned Swinburne (died 1909) in his "Hymn to Man," and that was but the best "wisdom" of Greek philosophers five centuries before Christ which he adopted as his personal credo. There is another line in that blasphemous poem that leaves one in no doubt as to exactly what Swinburne meant:

"But God, if a God there be, is the substance of men which is man."

How true it is that the "gods" of man's making are lust not "big" enough. So observed Francis Schaeffer in his book "He Is There and He Is Not Silent." [Bro. Cloud: Sadly, the late Dr. Schaeffer was not a friend to biblical fundamentalism nor to the Baptist faith.] That is why, he asserted, we need "a personal-infinite God" (p. 13).

"There is only one philosophy, one religion, that fills this need in all the world's thought, whether the East, the West, the ancient, the modern, the new, the old. Only one fills the philosophical need of existence, of being, and it is the Judaeo-Christian God--not just an abstract concept, but rather this God is really there. He really exists. There is no other answer, and orthodox Christians ought to be ashamed for having been defensive for so long. This is not a time to be defensive. There is no other answer" (Ibid., p. 13).

Schaeffer asks us to recognize that the word "god" is quite meaningless until some "content" is applied to it. Just to say the word "god" conveys absolutely opposite meanings to different people, but the content given in the Old and New Testaments does meet the need to explain the universe and man. Only the Christian answer of "an infinite-personal God, who is personal unity in diversity on the high order of the Trinity" can meet that need (p. 14).

When Schaeffer was once asked how he could believe in the Trinity he replied: "I would still be an agnostic if there were no Trinity. And why? because without that 'personal unity and diversity' expressed in the Trinity there are no answers. The Nicene Creed (A.D. 325) when it spoke of Three Persons in the Godhead, rather than being a throw-back to the misty past, 'catapulted the Creed into our century.' These Christian forefathers did not invent the Trinity in order to satisfy questions raised by Greek philosophy, as often charged against them. The 'unity and diversity problem [the One and the Many] was there, and they realized that in the Trinity as it had been taught in the Bible they had an answer that no one else had" (Ibid., p. 16). It is the Christian answer, or nothing!

The Rev. Phipps says: "The critical thing is that we're together in Christ's love, exploring our faith and trying to be faithful." What can he mean? What Christ and what love is he referring to? What does he mean by "exploring our faith"? A Unitarian, at the beginning of this century, put it more forthrightly, when, in reference to ministers who were denying theism in favour of humanism, said they "speak as representatives of our movement and feel they have a right to do so since we stand for nothing but the liberty to stand for anything and nothing" (Gordon, op. cit. p.74)!! Is that not the *reductio ad absurdum* of Christianity? Is that not proof of the bankruptcy of *homo sapiens*?

Yet that seems to be the "spirit" motivating Mr. Phipps and his United Church at this critical point in that church's chequered history. [Bro. Cloud: We wouldn't call this denominational monstrosity a "church."] "DON'T LABEL YOUR HERESY," WAS THE ADVICE GIVEN BY AN OLDER TO A YOUNGER MINISTER. "DO AS I DO. GIVE THEM HERESY IN SUCH FASHION THAT THE VERY SAINTS WILL NOT SUSPECT IT. BAD ETHICS, YOU SAY! I SAY, VERY BAD! BUT THIS IS THE ONLY WAY IN WHICH HUNDREDS OF ORTHODOX PULPITS CAN BE HELD" (Ibid., p. 96). The Rev. W.S. Morgan, who gave the above immoral advice, had once been a Baptist minister educated at Yale Divinity School. Actually, Mr. Morgan has given us the "real game-plan" of the promoters of "another Gospel, which is not another." Attack orthodoxy from within! Their task has ever been to capture the strongholds, not by direct attack, but by depending on the "crypto-Unitarians staying in evangelical churches. This is the leaven working from within the lump! Thank God the Apostle Paul counseled his young colleague Timothy with very different advice (1 Timothy 4:1-7), or where would the Gospel of Christ be today?

There is what is known as "negation in theology" and it is very important to consider this. It is a help to our understanding of the meaning of a term by contrasting it with other terms, thus showing what it does not mean. Scripture often does this by contrasting truth with error and sin, for example. This is why the historic creeds appear negative in style. They are the result of the response of the fathers to some heresy or other. This is true in the matter before us in this paper. The terms used to defend the Deity of Christ and the Trinity were in response to the terms used to attack Christ and the Trinity. John M. Frame, in his book, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 1987, states on p. 233:

"Thus the use of those terms don't give us much positive information on the divine nature. They don't seek to solve the great mystery here but only to exclude the heresies of Sabellianism and Arianism. Thus when we seek to prove the doctrine of the Trinity, we should not go looking through the Bible to find some specific justification for the use of those technical terms, rather, we should simply ask whether Scripture teaches Sabellianism or Arianism. If Scripture excludes those teachings, then that fact is sufficient proof of the orthodox doctrine."

In the battles with heresy, men of God sought to meet the subtle attacks of their opponents with proofs drawn from the Word of God. Beside this, as noted above, it was found necessary to adopt specific terms in order to define the truth more clearly, sometimes by way of negation. HERETICAL TEACHERS OFTEN HID THEIR ERRORS UNDER SCRIPTURAL PHRASEOLOGY WHILE ASSIGNING MEANINGS QUITE DIFFERENT FROM WHAT WAS RECEIVED. Arius spoke of Christ, as Son of God, "being generated of the Father before time," but "not from all eternity," and, therefore, there was "a time when the Son was not." This led the ancient Fathers to use the term "eternal generation" to express the proper and eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ. All the other terms that sometimes trouble people were used for the same reason, namely, to oppose the Arian heresy that Christ was not of the same, but only of similar substance with the Father. In the Greek language the two words used for same (homousios) and similar (homoiousios) were differentiated by only one letter, an "i" (iota). This gave rise to the saying: "It doesn't matter an iota." Sometimes that is true, but here that "iota" made the difference between worshipping a "creature" or "idol," and the only begotten Son of God.

Other pressures at this period came mainly from two other sources, namely, Origen's "subordinationism" of Christ and Sabellianism. Origen (A.D. 185-254) held that the Logos was subordinate and inferior to the Father. This made the unity of God and Christ impossible. He taught that there was a difference of essence between the Father and the Son. He thus paved the way for Arianism. Sabellius taught in Rome (A.D. 210-215) that the Trinity was One Essence but the three Persons were simply three different characters or "modes" (hence sometimes known as Modalism) in which the One God appeared at different times. Since, according to this scheme, there was no permanence in Christ's person, neither could he be divine.

In stressing the unity of the Godhead, in a charge to his clergy, Bishop Alexander of Alexandria, sought to head off the dreaded heretical ideas of Origenism and Sabellianism, was himself accused of the latter heresy by Arius, a presbyter. This was, said Arius, because the Bishop used the word "homousios" to affirm that the Three Persons of the Godhead were of the same substance. It was then that Arius saw his chance to win the debate, and solve a "problem" that had eluded the minds all the other Fathers before him. In his effort to counter the widespread "polytheism" of his day, he said there was one Supreme God with two inferior or lesser gods.

- (1) Since this Supreme God could have no direct dealings with the world (a pagan concept), He needed an Intermediary Being. This was the Logos or Word, who was the Agent in creation. He was more than a man, and could, therefore, be called God.
- (2) As the Son he was a finite being and not of the same substance" with the Father.
- (3) He was "begotten" so was in some sense a creature, and not eternal. There was "once" when he was not. Arius avoided using the word "time."
- (4) So "Christ is an incarnation of what is not God in what is not man." He was liable to change and even capable of sinning.
- (5) Christ cannot be an agent of either revelation of God or of redemption for man. This scheme of Arius must leave God and man forever separated by an impassable gulf.
- (6) The Holy Spirit similarly is the first created Being of the Son.

Arius' doctrine, rather than an improvement on Nicea, was simply a reflection of the heathen philosophy of his day, with its triads of gods. He clearly did not escape "polytheism"; he merely replaced it with his "tritheism," three gods, One big god and two little gods. In order to popularize these new ideas he put them into catchy rhymes and tunes which were sung about the streets and by fish-porters on the quays of Alexandria. The United Church of Canada certainly understands the vital importance of getting their unwary congregations singing their "new" theology, as witnessed in the production of its latest hymnbook. They learnt this soul-destroying subversion, not only from Arius of old, but more recently from the Unitarian, Prof. F.G. Peabody, in his book "The Church of the Spirit" (p.15). He wrote:

"If a man were permitted to make the hymns of the church, he need not care who should make its theology."

These are the people who boast that "Jesus is not the centre of our religion," and "God is not the foundation principle of our faith." Yet, in the next breath they declare: "We too believe in and follow Christ." Again we ask, as we asked Moderator Phipps: "What faith and what Christ are they following?" Clearly there is deception in this language.

"The Arian use of the term God, true God, and the like, was a mere deception, because they affixed to them ideas that the Scriptures would by no means admit. Yet they censure the Council of Nicea for introducing a new term when all that was meant by it was to express their interpretation of the Scriptures. This appears unreasonable in the last degree, however fashionable. To say that they ought to have confined themselves to the very words of Scripture, when the Arians had first introduced their own gloss, seems much the same as to say that the Trinitarians had not the same right with the Arians to express their own interpretation of Scripture and in their own language" (Milner's Church History, Vol. 2, p. 58).

Coming, as this writer did, from the Irish Presbyterians, where he was initially trained, he may be permitted to draw on that background in conclusion. The battles among these Presbyterians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries took the form of "subscription or non-subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith" as the means of determining the "soundness of faith" of

its ministers. It was really a division between what were called "the old lights," the orthodox or conservatives, and the "new lights," the "enlightened" liberals.

In the 1822 this issue became most acute. The "non-subscribers" were in reality either unwilling or unable to sign the "Confession" because their beliefs and the "Confession" did not agree. Most, if not all of them, were secretly or openly Arian in their Christology. Thus this became known as the Arian controversy. A Dr. Bruce taught Hebrew and Greek to ministerial students. He said: "We are commonly designated Arians, and we do not object to the term. ... We are anti-trinitarians."

Compulsory subscription did not work to remove all doubt as to a minister's "soundness of faith." According to Henry Montgomery, the leader of the non-subscribing party, "it was jocularly urged that the 'soundness of faith' was a pleasant India-rubber phrase which every Presbytery could stretch so as to suit its own views." Dr. Montgomery wrote an article entitled *The Creed of an Arian* (1830). He also preached against Justification by Faith, demonstrating that Arianism led naturally to the denial of other fundamentals.

The Athanasius at this juncture was Dr. Henry Cooke. He championed orthodoxy and opposed Arianism in church and college. WHAT CANNOT BE OVERLOOKED IS THAT THIS CHRISTOLOGICAL OR TRINITARIAN CONTROVERSY WAS AND IS REALLY A SOTERIOLOGICAL ISSUE. This was how Cooke put this critical conflict before his fellow ministers --

"Were the dogma of the Trinity a mere dogma of revelation, were it a mere description of the divine nature, addressed to the intellect, and not the heart of man, were it mere opinion, which, be it true or false, would leave the temple of our Christianity a lovely solid and indestructible building--we could contemplate the defence or assault of it an exhibition of mere theological gladiatorship, and view the event of the conflict as a matter of comparative indifference. But these things are not so. The doctrine of the Trinity is the only foundation of sacrifice and atonement; and sacrifice and atonement are the vital principles of a believer's hopes" (Henry Cooke, *Missionary Sermons and Speeches Delivered at a Special Meeting of the General Synod of Ulster*, Belfast, 1834).

The Question of all questions is still: "What think ye of Christ, whose Son is he?" THE DOCTRINE OF THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST AND ITS COROLLARY, THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY, STAND OR FALL TOGETHER:

- (1) that Father, Son and Holy Spirit share the same divine nature expresses the essential Christian conviction that God Himself was acting In Christ to save His people;
- (2) that in Christ we encounter the eternal God Himself.

Even the German liberal scholar, Harnack, acknowledged that in the fourth century conflict: "Had the Arian doctrine gained the victory ... it would in all probability have completely ruined

Christianity, that is, it would have annihilated religion." Harnack, certainly no friend of Biblical Christianity, recognized that the Athanasian position preserved the basis of the Christian experience of "reconciliation with God" (History of Dogma, London, 1898, IV, p. 43).

A contemporary patristic scholar, Maurice Wiles, also sympathetic to Arianism, has nevertheless gone on record as follows:

"To say that the church was wrong to insist on the full divinity of Christ and that therefore the whole trinitarian doctrine was an unnecessary and misguided construction ... now as then, is the thing that more decisively than any other, has been understood to set a man outside the Christian fellowship" ("Journal of Theological Studies," XIII, 1992).

Why, then, in the case of the Rev. Mr. Phipps, is he not only not excluded from full fellowship in the United Church, but also allowed to remain in the highest position of that denomination as its Moderator? As our blessed Lord "suffered without the gate," so all His followers are exhorted: "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach" (Hebrews 13:12-13). what think ye of Christ is still the test? He is either True Son of God or a "man-made" idol? If you choose Him as Son of God and your only Saviour, it may well put you without "the camp," but what blessed company you will share. "Choose you this day whom you will serve."

Make no mistake, your choice determines your destiny.

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